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Inhaltsverzeichnis – Table des Matières – Contents

Aufsätze – Articles – Articles

Rezensionen – Comptes rendus – Reviews

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Pries, Andreas H. / Martzolff, Laetitia / Langer, Robert / Ambos, Claus (eds.). *Rituale als Ausdruck von Kulturkontakt. „Synkretismus" zwischen Negation und Neudefinition. Akten der interdisziplinären Tagung des Sonderforschungsbereiches „Ritualdynamik" in Heidelberg, 3.–5. Dezember 2010*. (Studies in Oriental Religions 67). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013, 221 pp., ISBN 978-3-447-06911-3.

This book presents a collection of articles from the interdisciplinary conference "Rituals as Expression of Culture-Contact – "Syncretism" between Negation and New-Definition" organized in Heidelberg in December 2010 within the frame of the collaborative research center "'Ritual Dynamics' – Socio-Cultural Processes from a Historical and Culturally Comparative Perspective", (SFB 619) funded by the German Research Foundation.

The aim of the conference as explained in the introduction was to establish a chronologically and geographically broad basis of case studies for a study of the complex phenomenon "syncretism", and to debate and reevaluate to what extent the term "syncretism" might or might not serve to unite the different phenomena described in the different case studies. With the latter question, the project refers back to a collaborative research project from the 1970s on "Syncretism in Oriental Religions", and to the conference volume *Synkretismus in den Religionen Zentralasiens,* edited by Walther Heissig and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit,[1] published 1987 in the same series (*Studies in Oriental Religions*) as the volume at hand.

Different from the previous project, this conference limits the large spectrum of phenomena, which can be characterized as syncretistic, by a focus on ritual. With the underlying assumption that cultural identities and therefore also cultural techniques and meaning do not emerge as closed systems, but are formed by exchange and contact, the organizers ask, which specific factors form rituals in cultural contact. Such factors might include hegemonic centers, cultural dominance, religious fashions as well as economic, political or geophysical factors.

Ten articles present exemplary case studies of syncretistic phenomena in contemporary as well as antique cultures in south-eastern Europe and Asia

1 Heissig, Walther / Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim (eds.). *Synkretismus in den Religionen Zentralasiens. Ergebnisse eines Kolloquiums vom 24.5 bis 26. 5 1983 in St. Augustin bei Bonn.* (Studies in Oriental Religions; 13). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987.

Dr. Friederike Assandri: Sinologisches Seminar, Humboldt Universität Berlin, Germany/ Zentrum für Ostasienstudien, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Elisenstr. 23, 12169 Berlin, Germany. E-mail: friederike_assandri@yahoo.com

Minor, in the Near-East and Egypt, in South and Southeast Asia, Central Africa and Central America. Four articles and the introduction are written in German; six articles are written in English. All articles are preceded by a short English abstract. Regrettably, the book does not offer an index or a separate bibliography, nor does it present information on the contributors.

Charles Stewart's article "Creolization, Ritual and Syncretism. From Mixture to Crystallization" opens the collection aptly with a discussion of the social science vocabulary for "cultural mixture". He shows that the commonly, and often almost interchangeably used terms, which describe cultural mixture, namely "syncretism", "creolization", "hybridity", "fusion", all focus on "mixing", and that their use is marred by confusion and crossovers. He contrasts this then with the clear analytical vocabulary of a "hard science" (p. 4) concerned with mixture, namely chemistry, which differentiates different kinds of mixtures according to well defined principles. However, the author rightly points out that chemistry focuses on units of nature – and that "these units do not talk back". Different from chemistry, the people classified in social sciences can be affected by classification; thus modes of classification may cause "looping effects" (p. 5); classification itself might cause social change.

With the example of two contemporary case studies, Albanian immigrants' changing role in a local Greek patron-saint festival, and the changes to a local ritual brought by Japanese Brazilians[2] in a kite flying festival in Hamamatsu, Steward argues for the importance of the temporal dimension in the evaluation and study of mixture: "hybridity must be understood temporally as a particular moment when exogenous traditions appear new and different to each other" (p. 9). These hybrids may eventually become a new coherent entity – thus hybrids have "life-cycles" (p. 9), people move from consciously perceiving mixture to "taking their own composition for granted" (p. 9). Proposing the term "*nucleation*", Stewart argues that the study of syncretism or hybridity should shift its focus from components and proportions to "the formation and dissolution of 'zones of difference' or 'spaces of identification'". Such a focus would allow to "highlight the crucial dimension of time", in the process of "formation, dissolution, and reformation of entities" (p. 10).

Philipp Bruckmayr's article "Between Institutionalized Syncretism and Official Particularism. Religion among the Chams of Vietnam and Cambodia" presents a case study of syncretism and difference among communities of Cham in Cambodia and Vietnam. The Cham are the descendants of the former principality

2 "Japanese Brazilians" refers to second or third generation descendents of Japanese immigrants in Brazil, who returned to live and work in Japan.

Champa in Vietnam, which was dissolved in 1832. The religion of the Cham has seen as of the 15th century the development of a distinct southern Cham Brahmanism and also growing Islamization. Today, the larger part of Cham people lives in diaspora in Cambodia; a smaller, non-diasporic group of Chams live in Vietnam in the former Champa area, in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan.

About two thirds of the non-diasporic Chams in Vietnam profess Cham Brahmanism, one third adheres to a local form of Islam. The two groups, called *Cham Jat* (Brahman) and *Cham Bani* (Muslim), generally live in separate villages, and they have developed different rituals. However, in doctrines and practice, the two groups display "a syncretism greatly contingent on the respective sub-ethnic religious other" (p. 18), with examples of co-opted deities, a long established practice of active inter-religious interaction and a more recent shared interest in their common literary heritage in Cham language. Bruckmayr observes that the two religious groups of the Cham in Vietnam live in "a quasi-symbiotic state with clearly defined religious boundaries, which in no way obstruct the partaking in a shared ritual world and view of history" (pp. 20–21).

The diasporic Cham from Cambodia, different from the Cham of Vietnam, are exclusively Muslim. The original Cham script and literature fell in disuse among most of them since the early 1900's. A process of Malayization lead to the emergence of two factions: one uses Malay language in religious texts and education, the other insists on Cham and Qur'ānic Arabic. In 1998 the Cambodian government "institutionalized" these differences, recognizing two separate Islamic communities: the *Cambodian Highest Council for Religious Affairs*, and the *Islamic Community Kan Imam San*. This second group rejects the use of Malay script for religious education and promotes Cham script. Referring to Stewart's article's injunction to look at the crystallization- instead of the mixing-points, and at specific timeframes of such processes, Bruckmayr notes that official recognition by the state helped the *Kan Imam San*'s community's re-assertion "of distinctly local Cham traditions in the face of the local consequences of regionally, and even globally, totalizing hegemonic religious processes" (pp. 36–37).

Contextualizing his case in the larger theme of syncretism in Islam, the author criticizes the frequent use of the term *syncretistic* in a sense intending "heterodox" as opposed to an imagined "essential", "true" Islam. He invokes instead Asad's[3] call to treat Islam as a discursive tradition, with numerous subdiscourses shaped by local and historical conditions pushing towards coherence while sustaining particularities. In this sense, the Southeast-Asian Muslim groups

3 Asad, Talal. *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,* Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986 (reprint 1996).

can be considered as distinct local Islamic traditions rather than cases of syncretism (p. 39). The case of the Vietnamese *Cham Bani* Muslims however is more complex on account of its quasi-symbiotic relationship with the Brahmanist *Cham Jat*, which he characterizes as "institutionalized syncretism". This syncretism is characterized by one shared local religious culture, held together by the existence and maintenance of clearly delineated religious boundaries, in a constant process of dialogical interaction.

Hasan Ali Khan's essay "The Satpanth. A multi-faith belief system from the Indo-Muslim Middle Ages" offers an analysis of aspects of syncretism of esoteric astrological teachings in the belief system of the Satpanth (true path). Satpanth is a complex teaching and belief system that originates from a Shii-Ismaili background and incorporates Zoroastrian and Hindu elements. It was founded in the 13th century by the Ismaili missionary Pir Shams, who "perfected a system of metaphysical interlacing called Satpanth, or true path, setting up ceremonies that tied him to the Suhrawardi Sufi Order" (p. 43). Hasan Ali Khan presents history and teachings of the Satpanth, starting from an analysis of festivals at the shrine of Pir Shams in Punjab. Exploring aspects of esoteric astrological teachings and astronomical calculations, the study documents in much detail how an astrological framework based on the Persian New Year (Nauroz) and its connection to the vice-regency (*wilayat*) of the first Shii Imam Ali, is correlated astrologically with local practices related to the Hindu month of Chetir. The author furthermore presents illustrated examples of symbols and layouts of architecture, in particular in monuments belonging to the Suhrawardi Order, which show the multi-religious symbolism of Satpanth and an astrological symbolism related to the vice-regency (*wilayat*) of Ali and Shii-Ismaili esoteric teachings. The essay is richly illustrated with 3 tables, 2 astrological charts, and 12 figures with photos, charts and designs.

In "Limits of Syncretism: Bababudhan Dargah in South India as a Paradigm for Overlapping Religious Affiliations and Co-existence", Sudha Sitharaman discusses the interaction of Muslim and Hindu traditions in the local context of the *Dargah* of Bababudhan in Chickamagalur in Karnataka. This *dargah* is, like other *darghas,* a "multi-religious shrine" (p. 81), where Muslims and non-Muslims venerate the saints. Sitharaman argues that in the context of her case-study, it would be a mistake to speak of overlapping religiosity and practices in terms of syncretism, because the term syncretism would assume that "Hinduism and Islam are internally singular and absolutely exclusive, and further, that the Semitic religions and Hindu traditions are instances of the same kind and therefore it is possible that followers of both are able to draw from each other's practices" (p. 109). She argues her case by drawing up evidence from the perspectives of devotee individuals and the nuances in their understanding. She proposes that instead of

syncretism, which presupposes a singularity, the concept of tradition as proposed by Asad (1986)[4] might serve as a more appropriate analytic concept: "Tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history." (p. 108)

Eszter Spät's article "On Soil and Jinn. Ritual practices and syncretism among the Yezidis of Northern Iraq" discusses syncretistic developments focusing on healing rituals of the Kurdish speaking Yezidis in Northern Iraq. Yezidi religion shows the influence of different religions once present in the region of Northern Iraq. It is an "oral religion" (p. 112), and orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy assumes an important role in Yezidism. Rituals are generally connected to Yezidi holy places, "owned" by *khas* (angelic or divine beings). Many of these holy places are known for specialized healing powers, and healing rituals and practices connected to them can be traced back centuries and can be related to practices of other religions. One example cited is the ritual of incubation (the practice of sleeping in the shrine), a practice well known in the Mediterranean Basin from ancient Greek religion to Christianity, and among Muslims, in particular those belonging to Sufism. Another ritual practice that can be traced in Christian and Muslim historical practices is the use of sacred soil from a holy place. These rituals therefore "connect the Yezidis with other cultures and religions of the region in time and space" (p. 111). Turning to contemporary Yezidi-Muslim relations, Spät points out, that while traditionally Muslims considered Yezidis as heretics, infidels and unclean (p. 124), Yezidi healing shrines nevertheless also attract Muslim supplicants, and there are instances of influence of Muslim healing practices in Yezidi rituals (p. 126). However, recent developments show according to Spät a "reverse syncretism" (p. 129), where increasingly educated Yezidis, trying to emphasize philosophical and moral elements of their religion while rejecting those considered unscientific or superstitious, also reject anything that is perceived as an adoption from Islam.

Yuri Stoyanov, in his paper "The Question of the Existence of Dualist Layers in Alevi/Bektāşī Syncretism and their Central Asian, Anatolian or Balkan Provenance", presents yet another example of a religious phenomenon often characterized as syncretism, namely the Alevi/Bektāşī tradition. Stoyanev focuses on the question of the existence of earlier Manichaean and/or later Eastern Christian dualist layers in Alevism/Bektāşīsm and its implications for the appraisal of the phenomenon termed Alevi/Bektāşī syncretism. He discusses a nineteenth cen-

4 Just like Bruckman in the same volume, she refers to Asad 's claim that an anthropology of Islam should begin from a concept of a discursive tradition. See Asad 1986 (repr. 1996): 7, 14–17.

tury historiographical model, which claims that medieval Christian dualist heretical communities in Anatolia and the Balkans converted to Islam as a reaction against persecution. While evidence based research has discredited this theory, it has proven a remarkable vitality in the post-Ottoman Christian majority states, who tried to anchor Alevi and Bektāşī identities in local Christian environments. Scholarly research arguing in favor or against these theories coexists in these cases with top-down ideological and politico-religious projects intended to mould public opinion. Stoyanov critcizes that these ideological schemas, which also claim a "religious affinity" between late medieval Eastern Christian dualism and Islam, generally ignore the vital doctrinal spheres of cosmology, theology, anthropology, soteriology, and eschatology. Furthermore, they confuse conversion from one religious tradition to another with a "cross-confessional rapprochement for religio-political or socio-political reasons" (p. 139). In contrast, de-ideologized studies of patterns of interchange and overlap in spheres of cult and belief between different local versions of Christianity and Islam in the Middle East, Caucasus, Eastern Mediterranean, Balkans, and Anatolia, show that all Christian elements found in Alevism/Bektāşīsm relate rather to normative and popular Christianity than to heretical dualist forms. However, the theories relating Alevism/Bektāşīsm to early Christian dualism continue to flourish and to be instrumentalized in the dialogue and interchange between theological, scholarly and internal Alevi discourses on Alevism.

In her essay "Kult und Ritual der Isis zwischen Ägypten und Rom. Ein transkulturelles Phänomen", written in German, the Egyptologist Svenja Nagel presents examples of syncretism in antiquity. She documents with many examples multi-layered and differentiated forms of syncretism in the nature, iconography and cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis between Egypt and Rome. Analyzing the syncretistic phenomena relating to nature and iconography of the goddess, she differentiates (1) equivalencies, like the equation of names of Egyptian and Greek deities, e.g. Isis and Demeter, as documented by Herodotus, (2) adaptation and hybridization, exemplified by the deity Sarapis, which was formed from a hybridization of Osiris and Apis with Greek iconographic characteristics, and (3) the integration of different deities in the concept of "Isis". For examples of the latter, Nagel points to iconographies, which combine elements of different goddesses into an Isis-Aphrodite and an Isis-Astarte. Asking how this syncretism reveals itself in ritual, the author inquires to what extent ritual practice as documented in Roman and Greek contexts reflects original Egyptian rituals. As examples of adaptation and transformation of ritual, she cites the Greek prayer formula praying for "the refreshing water of Osiris", which is found in funeral inscriptions in Egypt and Rome from the 1st–3rd centuries, and suggests its possible relation to ancient Egyptian cults of water libations for the dead. In addition, she illustrates

how some elements of the rituals in Greco-Roman Isis sanctuaries show a continuation of Egyptian cults with regard to the accessibility of the inner sanctuary. She closes her essay by pointing out that the porosity of the religious systems of antiquity, which allowed a steady flow of ideas and concepts in both directions, is at the very base of the common cultural heritage of Europe and the Orient.

Joachim Friedrich Quack's paper "Zauber ohne Grenzen. Zur Transkulturalität der spätantiken Magie", documents how late antique (2nd–4th centuries CE) magic was a "very transcultural phenomenon incorporating elements of different origin and blending them in a new whole" (p. 177). "Magic" and "magic rituals" here pertain to rituals with a specific and well defined aim, related usually to an individual, which are non-recurrent and conducted either prophylactically or in response to a specific need or crisis. Manifold sources relating to magic and magic rituals have been excavated in the entire realm of the Roman Empire. These sources often transgress the borders between text and image; papyri texts of manuals and recipes are often illustrated; amulets and spells on metal tablets and cameos contain images and inscriptions.

Socially, even though magic was not publicly allowed, networks of persons involved or interested in magic existed. Quack details examples of the differentiated use of various languages, including Hieratic, Demotic, Hieroglyphic, Hebrew, Persian and Greek, which points to polyglot language competences of the users and authors of the various texts and manuals. With many concrete examples he documents how different languages were incorporated or transcribed into Greek, resulting in "opaque sound-sequences" (p. 177) valued primarily for their supposed power. Another point of interest is the intermingling of Jewish and Egyptian traditions, which Quack illustrates with examples of the Egyptian gods Ptah and Thot being taken up in otherwise Jewish contexts.

Contextualizing his case-study in the context of syncretism, the author points out that the examples cited, which have been traditionally described as syncretism, generally have one common characteristic: religiously relevant figures are incorporated in a new context. Often, in the new context, different traditions meet and new conceptions of the incorporated elements appear. Quack raises the question, to what extent openness for new figures and ideas might be a characteristic or even part of the nature of religious systems in general. In another line of thought Quack asks to what extent a deep structure of procedures might last through changes in space and time. He illustrates this point with the example of a technique from the late antiquity's magic manuals which he calls "the torture of the thief", tracing changes step by step from the 3rd to the 19th century. According to him, these steps should not be termed syncretism. Instead, they represent a reworking of basic structural elements to fit the respective social-religious circumstances of different times.

The last two, rather short articles of the volume offer perspectives from Africa and Mesoamerica.

Heinrich Balz article, "Ndie, das Dorfahnenfest der Bakossi in Kamerun. Regionale Abgrenzungen und vorkoloniale Verwandlungen", focuses on traces of the pre-Christian annual village ancestor feast Ndie, which survive in the present Christian harvest thanksgiving of the Bakossi in Cameroon. Balz, who has studied these rituals during a ten year theological mission among the Bakossi, describes the village ancestor festival of the Bakossi, pointing out differences to similar festivities of neighboring communities. Evaluating different well established anthropological theories, he concludes that the Bakossi festival might be best explained resorting to Victor Turners (1969)[5] concept of *communitas*. Paying attention to the issue of cyclical rituals vs. non-recurrent crisis rituals, which is also relevant for the Christianization process, since regular rituals are easier replaceable than non-recurrent crisis rituals, he argues that the Bakossi changed their village festival from a non-recurrent crisis ritual into a regular agrarian ritual already in pre-colonial times. This then facilitated the introduction of the regular Christian harvest thanksgiving ritual. Balz points out explicitly that his case study rather than contributing to the conference motto "Syncretism and Culture-Contact", shows the limits of the concept, because in this case changes were due not to contacts with another culture, but prompted by adaptation to internal social processes. He argues that this example underscores that new developments do not exclusively arise from contacts with different cultures.

Viola König's article "‚Über-Kreuz' – Ikonographie und Symbolismus mesoamerikanischer Kreuzformen vor und nach der spanischen Eroberung", asks what effect the introduction of the iconography and symbolism of the cross as a symbol of Christianity by the Spanish conquerors had on indigenous uses of the symbolism of a cross or quincunx. She presents an analysis of occurrences of the Mesoamerican symbol of the quincunx in the city layout of Teotihuacan and in several signs of the Mesoamerican ritual calendar, concluding that the cross was an important basic form for the symbolic representation of the worldview of indigenous Mesoamerican people. In her opinion, the Christian cross did not substitute the indigenous cross or quincunx, because it belonged to a new world, perceived as parallel to the tradtional one at first (p. 221), and eventually replacing it, because "following the suppression of the pre-Columbian world and the native religions, the use of these [indigenous] symbols no longer made sense" (p. 209).

5 Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process. Structure and Antistructure*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.

Reconsidering the aims of the conference and publication mentioned in the introduction, the volume succeeds in presenting a broad base of case studies and theoretical considerations for the discussion of "syncretism" – from concrete and well documented case studies that show the nuances and complexities of processes termed "syncretism", to theoretical considerations of the usefulness of the term in different contexts, from documentations of syncretistic processes in antiquity to demonstrations of the effect of the use of the term in scholarly discourse on socio-religio-political discourse, akin to Steward's so-called "looping effects". However, this reviewer feels that the second aim, namely to debate and reevaluate to what extent the term "syncretism" might or might not serve to unite the different phenomena described in different case studies, would have deserved to be addressed in more detail either in the introduction, or in an additional conclusion. In view of the fact that all articles argue explicitly for or against the usefulness of the term of "syncretism", the reader misses an introduction or conclusion, which pulls all the different threads of the case studies together, offering an explicit re-evaluation of the term under discussion. The summarizing statement "It has become clear again that there is no better term than 'syncretism' as *façon de parler*" (p. IX) does not really do justice to the wide array of opinions presented. Nevertheless, the book is a valuable contribution that will be appreciated by historians of religion interested in syncretism or in inter-cultural and inter-religious contacts of the past and present, as well as by students of the religions of the various regions represented in this volume.